

JOHANNES BRAHMS & RICHARD MÜHLFELD:  
SONATA IN F MINOR FOR CLARINET & PIANO, OP. 120 NO. 1

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Johannes Brahms and Richard Mühlfeld: Sonata in F Minor for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 120 No. 1  
by  
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## Johannes Brahms and Richard Mühlfeld: Sonata in F Minor for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 120 No. 1

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) originally planned to retire from composing after completing his String Quintet in G Major (“Prater”), Op. 111. However, his mind was quickly changed after being inspired by the performances of Meiningen clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (1859-1907). Brahms enjoyed Mühlfeld’s interpretation of the Weber’s clarinet works, especially the Quintet, and was impressed by his ability to move easily between the different registers of the instrument. Because of the way Mühlfeld inspired him, Brahms was able to produce the Clarinet Quintet, the Clarinet Trio, and two Clarinet Sonatas, all of which have become a vital part of the instrument’s repertoire. The Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120 No. 1, in particular, demonstrates Brahms’ compositional style, especially his tendency to expand and reinvent classical forms. This work also demonstrates how intimately Brahms knew Mühlfeld’s playing, as well as the construction and tendencies of clarinets in general. The perfect combination of Brahms’ compositional style with Mühlfeld’s musicianship and mastery of his own instrument produced the F Minor Sonata.

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany on May 7, 1833. His father, Johann Jakob Brahms, worked as a freelance musician playing the flute, violin, cello, horn, and double bass. His mother, Christiana Nissen Brahms, was previously Johann Jakob Brahms’ landlord and was seventeen years older than him. Because of the conditions of Hamburg at the time of his birth, there exists a common misconception that the Brahms family was in poverty. However, the Brahms family was fairly secure financially and had the resources to pay for Johannes and his brother to attend a private school for boys. Johannes graduated when he was fourteen years old,



and much of his early training in music took place while he was a student at that school. He even taught piano lessons to one of his professors.<sup>1</sup>

Brahms began taking formal piano lessons when he was seven years old, and he later received lessons on horn and cello as well. His first piano teacher, Otto Cossel (1813-1865), laid the foundation for his great technique and taught him until he was ten years old. After Cossel, Brahms studied with Eduard Marxsen (1806-1887), who was Cossel's teacher. Marxsen taught both Brahms and his brother for free and gave Brahms his only formal lessons in music theory and composition. Brahms gave his first solo performance for friends and family when he was ten years old and gave his first public performance when he was thirteen. He made his debut as a professional pianist just before he turned sixteen (April 1849) and included one of his own compositions in the performance. At the beginning of his performing career, he often performed in taverns and dance halls, for the Hamburg City Theater, and in private concerts given by the wealthy. He also earned extra money for his family by teaching piano lessons.<sup>2</sup>

When he was nineteen, Brahms began a short recital tour with violinist Eduard Remenyi. They toured of a few small towns in northern Germany in order to help Brahms build his own concert career as well as for him to earn some money and help support his family. This tour also marked the beginning of Brahms' career as a composer. On this trip, Remenyi took him to Hanover to meet Joseph Joachim, one of the most highly respected violinists of the time, with whom Brahms remained friends for the rest of his life. Through Joachim, Brahms was introduced to Liszt, Berlioz, and Robert and Clara Schumann. The Schumanns would both make a profound impact on his professional and personal life. When Brahms returned to Hamburg in December

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<sup>1</sup> Styra Avins, "Johannes Brahms," from www.OxfordMusicOnline, Internet; accessed 1 October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



1853 after completing the tour he had seven works that were soon to be printed by leading publishers. Brahms never earned royalties on his works but was paid a flat fee for each up front.<sup>3</sup>

After Robert Schumann's death in 1856, Brahms's output of compositions slowed and he spent time studying counterpoint with Joachim, the compositions of master composers, and revised many of his early compositions. For three seasons (September-December, 1857-1859), he was the choral director of the private chorus of Count Leopold III zur Lippe (1821-1875). Lippe is a district in Northern Germany, and it became a part of the German Empire following the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Leopold III supported Prussia during the war and was best known for giving the Catholic and Lutheran churches in Lippe the same rights as the state religion (Calvinism). Brahms was also the piano teacher to his sister, the Royal Princess Marie, as well as some of her friends and family. In addition to his travels, Brahms was also concerned with becoming an established musician in his home city of Hamburg.

Brahms worked to establish his professional career in Hamburg by founding a women's chorus (1859), teaching, conducting, and working to revive his career as a soloist. In 1862, he travelled to Vienna after being rejected as the conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic and Choral Society. Brahms became the conductor of the Vienna Singverein in 1863, but he resigned after only a year in order to devote more time to composing, performing, and getting his music published. In 1875 he settled into his career of touring as a performer and conductor during the autumn and winter, travelling during the spring, and spending the summers composing – usually in the mountains.<sup>4</sup> Later, his summer sojourns would take him to Meiningen, where he would meet clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



The Meiningen Orchestra was composed of only fifty members and, at the height of its popularity, was believed to be able to play any of the most important works in the repertoire without a conductor and without sheet music (if necessary) at a moment's notice.<sup>5</sup> When visiting Meiningen, the Austrian music critic Hanslick noted that the orchestra consisted of forty-eight players of whom “the clarinets are good, but not equal to the Viennese,” an opinion that was a little biased.<sup>6</sup> There were also many festivals in Meiningen, similar to the Bayreuth festivals that attracted many notable musicians.<sup>7</sup> In 1880, Hans von Bülow was appointed conductor of the Meiningen court orchestra. Von Bülow made the entire orchestra stand while playing in accordance with the old custom of court etiquette when the musicians, who were considered servants, were not allowed to be seated in the presence of their master. It was not until von Bülow and his successor Fritz Steinbach Meiningen came to Meiningen that the orchestra became one of the important orchestras in Germany.<sup>8</sup> Even though this orchestra lacked prestige in the beginning, it was still home to many very talented musicians, including the Mühlfeld family.

Mühlfeld was born in Salzungen, Germany on February 28, 1856 and died in Meiningen on June 1, 1907.<sup>9</sup> He was the youngest of four brothers, all of whom studied music with their father, Leonhard.<sup>10</sup> Leonhard Mühlfeld led a small orchestra with the violin, but could also play trumpet and double bass with enough skill to receive casual employment at the court of Saxe-Meiningen. Wilhelm, Mühlfeld’s brother, had a successful career in Wiesbaden as a conductor,

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna,” *Woodwind Magazine* (March 1949), <http://clarinet.org/Anthology1.asp?Anthology=9> [accessed December 2, 2009].

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld” in *Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past* (Suffolk: The Panda Group, 1971), 214.

<sup>7</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>8</sup> George Toenes, “Richard Mühlfeld,” *The Clarinet*, no. 23 (Summer 1956): 22, <http://clarinet.org/Anthology1.asp?Anthology=12> [accessed October 1, 2009].

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Pamela Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld,” from [www.OxfordMusicOnline](http://www.OxfordMusicOnline), Internet; accessed 1 October 2009.



oboist, trumpeter, and piano teacher.<sup>11</sup> Mühlfeld began studying both violin and clarinet as a child. When he was ten years old he performed a clarinet solo at a gathering of friends, and he was given a silver pocket watch as a reward. With the exception of some instruction from his father, Mühlfeld was entirely self-taught on clarinet and was able to develop a playing style that was entirely his own. Mühlfeld received some systematic violin instruction from Friedhold Fleischauser, who was concertmaster at Meiningen, and music theory lessons from Emil Büchner.<sup>12</sup>

Mühlfeld played the violin and clarinet in the orchestra at Salzungen, a city most known for its spas, under his father's direction until he became a violinist in the Meiningen Orchestra in 1873 when he was only seventeen years old.<sup>13</sup> After his move to Meiningen, Mühlfeld began to study violin with Büchner.<sup>14</sup> Mühlfeld began playing clarinet in the Meiningen Orchestra when he was asked to substitute for their clarinetist, Wilhelm Reif, who was in poor health. Mühlfeld also became the solo clarinetist for the band of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment from 1876-1879 as part of his military service. During this time, he was still available to perform as a soloist with the Meiningen orchestra on October 20, 1877 and to take part in concerts given by the orchestra while visiting Bayreuth in the summer of 1876 and Christmas 1878.<sup>15</sup> He was appointed principal clarinet of the Meiningen orchestra in 1879 when Reif resigned the post to him and held the post until his death.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of the fact that he was very critical, von Bülow recognized Mühlfeld's talent and allowed him to lead sectional rehearsals of the wind players. Those musicians were inspired by

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<sup>11</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 211 & 224.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 210-212.

<sup>13</sup> Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld.”

<sup>14</sup> Toenes, “Richard Mühlfeld,” 23.

<sup>15</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 212.

<sup>16</sup> Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld.”



his abilities, and the attention to detail they exhibited in their performances was attributed to Mühlfeld's leadership. Mühlfeld especially enjoyed Weber's music, and he introduced the Meiningen orchestra to the Clarinet Concertino by playing it on a concert given to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth. It was also Mühlfeld's interpretations of Weber's works, especially the Quintet, that would later convince Brahms to write his chamber pieces for clarinet.<sup>17</sup>

The Meiningen orchestra visited Bayreuth frequently from 1888-1896, and during that time Mühlfeld became one of the Wagner family's most esteemed artists. While he was in Bayreuth, Richard Wagner heard him play and was so impressed after hearing him perform Beethoven's *Egmont* overture with the orchestra that he told him, "Young friend, continue in this way and the whole world is open to you."<sup>18</sup> Wagner also wrote a testimonial for Mühlfeld during the negotiations that took place when Breslau offered him a job as a clarinetist in their military band, an offer Mühlfeld later declined. Siegfried Wagner, Richard's son, became good friends with Mühlfeld and would always visit the Mühlfeld house when in Meiningen.

In addition to his obligations to the Meiningen orchestra, Mühlfeld began conducting a male voice choir in 1887. This conducting experience prepared him to take on the role of music director of the Meiningen orchestra when Reif died in 1890. He was also made music director of the Meiningen court theater in 1890.<sup>19</sup> As Mühlfeld's reputation grew, both singers and instrumentalists would come to Meiningen to study interpretation with him.<sup>20</sup>

Other than his orchestral performances, the works Mühlfeld performed most frequently were the Mozart and Beethoven chamber works, D'Indy Trio, Saint-Saens Tarantelle, Heinrich

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<sup>17</sup> Weston, "'Mein Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 212.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>19</sup> Weston, "Richard Mühlfeld."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 213-215.



Baermann Concerto, Reissiger Fantasie, and songs with clarinet obligato by Spohr and Kalliwoda.<sup>21</sup> Many composers wrote works especially for Mühlfeld, including Waldemar von Baussnern, Gustave Jenner, Henri Marteau, Carl Reinecke, Princess Marie of Saxe-Meiningen, and Stanford and Theodor Verhey.<sup>22</sup> Gustav Jenner composed a Clarinet Sonata Op. 5 “for his dear friend Mühlfeld” in 1900. In 1901, Carl Reinecke dedicated his *Introduction and Allegro*, Op. 256 to Mühlfeld. Sir Charles Stanford also dedicated his Concerto Op. 80 to Mühlfeld, but later crossed out the dedication since Mühlfeld never played the piece. Henri Marteau, the famous French violinist, often performed chamber music with Mühlfeld and dedicated his Quintet composed in 1907 to Mühlfeld’s memory. Pamela Weston, a prominent clarinet teacher and historian, says of Mühlfeld’s success, “His fame had arrived almost overnight and before long he would be the most sought after clarinetist in the world.”<sup>23</sup> Mühlfeld was also a composer, though he never wrote anything for the clarinet specifically. Some of his works include the following: Concert Overture (1879), Romance for Trombone (1879), and Festival March for Orchestra (1897). None of these manuscripts survived.<sup>24</sup>

Mühlfeld’s instrument played an important role in creating the sound and playing style he was most known for. Mühlfeld played an advanced Müller-system clarinet made by Georg Ottensteiner in Munich, which is the same type of instrument that was played by Carl Baermann. Baermann was the principal clarinetist in Munich and worked with Ottensteiner to develop the key system that was used for the Ottensteiner clarinets. It was constructed with eighteen keys and several rollers to facilitate sliding. Mühlfeld also had a thin strip of metal affixed to the

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<sup>21</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 227 & 233.

<sup>22</sup> Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld.”

<sup>23</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 218.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 233.



mouthpiece to cushion his top teeth, and he tied his reed to the mouthpiece instead of using a metal ligature.<sup>25</sup>

The more modern instruments at this time were much better suited for playing fast technical passages than Mühlfeld's clarinet, but made smooth transitions between registers a little more difficult. Mühlfeld's clarinet, on the other hand, made technical passages more cumbersome to play, but made it possible for him change registers with much more grace and ease than was possible on these newer instruments.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Mühlfeld deliberately chose to play an instrument that was a downgrade from more current models that were readily available in order to preserve his own artistic vision. This was one of the most important things that set him apart from other clarinetists.

In addition to his choice of instrument, Mühlfeld was used to playing using a lower pitch center or tuning system. This made his sound much darker and broader than the sound of instruments tuned to the modern tuning system. In Vienna, Mühlfeld's pitch tendency was criticized as being excessively heavy and over-powering, but in England as well as other places the depth of pitch was considered a positive contribution to the richness of his tone.<sup>27</sup> This would often present a problem when Mühlfeld would play with a piano tuned to match more modern pitch tendencies, since his instrument would be extremely flat when played with the piano. Before meeting with Clara Schumann to play Brahms' sonatas, Mühlfeld mailed her his tuning fork and Brahms explained that he had difficulties matching his clarinet to other instruments and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>26</sup> Styra Avins, "Performing Brahms' Music: Clues from His Letters," in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performing Style*, ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 210.



hoped that she would alter her piano to match his tuning fork.<sup>28</sup> Brahms wrote to Clara in October 1894 to explain the situation:

And now I have to tell you about something which will cause us both a little annoyance. Mühlfeld will be sending you his tuning fork, so that the grand piano to which he is to play may be tuned to it. His clarinet only allows him yield very little to other instruments. In case your piano differs very much in pitch and you do not wish to use it for this purpose, perhaps Marie will sacrifice herself and allow her grand piano or her upright piano to be tuned to Mühlfeld's fork?!<sup>29</sup>

At first glance the fact that Mühlfeld would ask another musician, especially someone as well-respected as Clara Schumann, to alter her own instrument to suit his may seem presumptuous, when in fact it was the construction of Mühlfeld's instrument that made it impossible for him to play in tune with Clara's piano without retuning it.

Mühlfeld quickly became well known and built up a reputation for being an excellent musician and performer. In her book *Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past*, Pamela Weston says:

...not only was he a fine clarinetist, but also an innately perceptive artist, whose sense of style and wealth of expression enabled him to give the composer's works that richness and vocal quality that are their very essence. [...] He was able, perhaps as no other clarinetist has been able, to carry audiences to a real fever of excitement. The impression he made was less that of a superb executants on the clarinet than of an ultra fine artist who had merely chosen the clarinet as his medium of expression.<sup>30</sup>

Mühlfeld gained a good reputation for his solo performances of the Weber and Mozart concerti.<sup>31</sup> He also played an important role in establishing the clarinet as a solo instrument and showed the importance of interpretation over brilliant technique and flashy execution.<sup>32</sup> His performances were said to have been dramatic and very moving.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the attention he

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<sup>28</sup> Portnoy, "Brahms' Prima Donna."

<sup>29</sup> Berthold Litzman, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms 1853 – 1896* (Westport: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1979), 267.

<sup>30</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 209-210.

<sup>31</sup> Portnoy, "Brahms' Prima Donna."

<sup>32</sup> Richard K. Weerts, "Early Virtuosi of the Clarinet and their Contributions," *NACWPI Bulletin* 13, No. 1 [Fall 1964], <http://clarinet.org/Anthology1.asp?Anthology=13> [accessed October 1, 2009].

<sup>33</sup> Weston, "Richard Mühlfeld."



received from his colleagues in Meiningen, Mühlfeld received several decorations from the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and received the Royal Bavarian Gold Medal of Ludwig for his skill, knowledge, and industry, and partly because of his association with the Wagner family.<sup>34</sup>

Princess Marie of Saxe-Meiningen became fond of Mühlfeld and dedicated a Romanza to him, which he played with orchestral accompaniment on several occasions.<sup>35</sup>

In 1881, Brahms was invited by von Bülow as the guest of Duke George of Saxe-Meiningen to hear performances at the festival and to perform his second piano concerto during their “Brahms Series” of performances. Von Bülow was also an important champion of Brahms’ music in Meiningen and encouraged the Duke’s interest in Brahms and his music.<sup>36</sup> The Meiningen court orchestra, under von Bülow and his successor General Music-Director Fritz Steinbach, became the ensemble to give the most widely accepted performances of Brahms’ music.<sup>37</sup> Brahms developed a good relationship with the Duke and made frequent visits to Meiningen.

In 1891 Brahms began to admire Mühlfeld and his performances and became determined to write for him.<sup>38</sup> Up to this point, Brahms had not composed any chamber pieces which included the clarinet, though he favored the instrument in his symphonies and serenades, all of which were completed before he met Mühlfeld. Brahms particularly enjoyed the blending quality of the clarinet sound, which is why he was so pleased to find a clarinetist like Mühlfeld who made the most of the instrument in his exceptional solo performances.<sup>39</sup> Weston says:

It was no ordinary clarinetist, but a musician, with practical experience in most of the main branches of the art, who now asked to exhibit his entire repertoire of solo works, for

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 212 & 231.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 213-215.

<sup>37</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



the benefit of the composer. The impact of his playing was electrical and Brahms announced there and then his intention to write some chamber works for Mühlfeld. He discussed every aspect of the instrument's capabilities and asked again and again for the Mozart Quintet and Weber concertos.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after hearing Mühlfeld play for the first time, Brahms wrote to Clara on March 17, 1891: "If you had come here this week you would have heard, in addition to my symphonies and the *Haydn Variations*, for instance, the very fine [Weber] F minor Concerto for the clarinet. It is impossible to play the clarinet better than Herr Mühlfeld does here."<sup>41</sup> Later, in July 1891, Brahms wrote to Clara again and said of Mühlfeld's playing: "You have never heard such a clarinet player as they have there in Mühlfeld. He is absolutely the best I know. At all events this art has, for various reasons, deteriorated very much. The clarinet players in Vienna and many other places and quite fairly good in orchestra, but solo they give one no real pleasure."<sup>42</sup> Brahms was not the only one to be impressed with Mühlfeld's abilities. On January 15, 1882, Elizabeth von Herzogenberg wrote to Brahms after hearing the Meiningen orchestra play his Symphony No. 1 in C Minor: "But the Meiningen clarinetist is fine!"<sup>43</sup> Brahms was so impressed with Mühlfeld that he asked the clarinetist to play a private recital for him before he began work on his compositions for clarinet.

Even though Mühlfeld was twenty-three years younger than Brahms, the two of them developed a close relationship that lasted for the rest of Brahms' life. Weston says, "The coming of Brahms into Mühlfeld's life and the subsequent tours they did together had enriched that life beyond all possible conception."<sup>44</sup> Brahms introduced Mühlfeld as "Fraulein von Mühlfeld.

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<sup>40</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 215-216.

<sup>41</sup> Litzman, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms 1853-1896*, 191.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 214.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.



meine prima donna.” Brahms also referred to Mühlfeld as the “nightingale of the orchestra.”<sup>45</sup>

Clara Schumann was also very impressed with Mühlfeld and had the opportunity to play the sonatas with him.<sup>46</sup> Brahms wrote to Joachim on October 14, 1893 about getting together with Clara to play the sonatas: “In that case I would come too, would either invite Mühlfeld along or bring a viola part with me-to two clarinet sonatas that I would like to let Frau Schumann hear. These undemanding pieces would not disturb our contentment-but it would be nice!”<sup>47</sup> After hearing them play together, Clara wrote to Brahms on March 18, 1894, “And the man plays so wonderfully, he might have been specially created for your works. I marveled at his profound simplicity and the subtlety of his understanding,”<sup>48</sup> and later, on September 8, 1894, “We should set the clarinet player in gold.”<sup>49</sup>

From their first meeting, Brahms was inspired by Mühlfeld’s tone and his execution of the Weber and Mozart concerti.<sup>50</sup> Agility, or technical flare, is not the focus of the clarinet works, with the exception of a few key moments. In spite of the occasional “allegro” tempo markings, the faster movements of these works move along without feeling rushed or hasty.<sup>51</sup> It was Mühlfeld’s abilities as a solo performer that most impressed Brahms, since he believed that this talent was lacking in nearly all clarinetists of that time. In his letters to Clara Schumann, Brahms mentioned that he thought that the art of clarinet playing had greatly deteriorated, and that in Vienna the clarinetists did only well enough to satisfy the needs of the orchestra.<sup>52</sup> Brahms called Mühlfeld “absolutely the best wind-instrument player I know.”<sup>53</sup> Even one of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>46</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>47</sup> Styra Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 719.

<sup>48</sup> Litzman, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms 1853-1896*, 222.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>50</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>51</sup> Conrad Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>52</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>53</sup> Weerts, “Early Virtuosi of the Clarinet and Their Contributions.”



Brahms's patronesses, the Baroness Helene von Heldburg, was very impressed by Mühlfeld's playing. Brahms wrote to her on July 25, 1891:

It has not escaped me (just between us) how partial you are toward the Ducal K[ammermusiker] and M[usic] Dir[ector] Mühlfeld, and I have often wistfully observed how painstakingly and inadequately your eye sought him out in his orchestra seat. Last winter, at least, I was able to place him out in front – but now – I am bringing him into My Lady's chamber, he is to sit on your chair, you can turn pages for him and employ the rests I grant him for the most intimate conversation.... And by the way, your M. is simply the best master of his instrument, and for these pieces I wish to consider absolutely no place other than Meiningen.<sup>54</sup>

It was not long before Brahms set to work on what would become one of the most important contributions to the clarinet repertoire.

Brahms had originally planned to end his compositional career with the completion of the Viola Quintet in G Major, Op. III, but Mühlfeld persuaded him to compose for the clarinet.<sup>55</sup> In his book *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, Conrad Wilson says,

...it is hard not to feel that here, right at the end of his career, Brahms was only just beginning to resolve some of the problems that beset him in his earlier chamber music, especially in terms of clarity of texture. Above all, these works have a very personal pensiveness that brings to mind Brahms's comment about some of his piano pieces of the same period. 'Even one listener,' he remarked, 'is too many.'<sup>56</sup>

Besides being very personal, most of Brahms' compositions, including those he wrote later in his life, were also meant to be enjoyable to the performer. Brahms once criticized a piece of music that had parts that were unpleasant to play, saying, "You give people individual notes like the little pins in a music box. But a musician is not a musical box, he is a human being; he must always have something to say. If you give him the dissonance, you must also give him the resolution."<sup>57</sup> It is no wonder then that, though difficult at times, the clarinet works are enjoyable

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<sup>54</sup> Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, 686-687.

<sup>55</sup> Toenes, "Richard Mühlfeld," 25.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Avins, "Johannes Brahms."



to play. It is more than likely that Brahms listened to Mühlfeld's opinions when it came to how enjoyable it was for him to perform these works.

The trio and quintet were composed during Brahms' annual summer residence at Ischl. These works were performed from the manuscripts for the Duke's court on November 24, 1891 by the Joachim Quartet, which was considered to be one of the most famous of its time.<sup>58</sup> Joachim also praised Mühlfeld's playing, claiming that no one could outdo him in the art of delivery. "Mühlfeld, with his superb-tone Ottensteiner clarinets and string-like style of playing, and the Quartet, each possessing a Stradivarius of the very best period, produced a homogeneity of sound which can well be imagined."<sup>59</sup> After hearing a performance of the Clarinet Quintet, Clara Schumann wrote in her diary on March 17, 1893: "And how Mühlfeld plays! As if he had been born for this work. His playing is at once delicate, warm, and unaffected and at the same time it shows the most perfect technique and command of the instrument."<sup>60</sup> They also premiered these works in Berlin on December 12, 1891.<sup>61</sup>

The two clarinet sonatas were completed in Ischl by the middle of September, when Fritz Steinbach and his wife would come to visit.<sup>62</sup> Towards the end of September, Mühlfeld came to Ischl to rehearse the sonatas with the composer.<sup>63</sup> Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann about his work on the sonatas in August 1894:

...I am expecting the visit of the clarinet player Mühlfeld, and will try two sonatas with him, so it is possible that we may celebrate your birthday with music. [...] I wish you could be with us, for he plays very beautifully. If you could extemporize a little in F minor and E-flat major you would probably chance on the two sonatas. I would send them to you because you could play them quite comfortably, but the clarinet would have to be transposed and that would spoil your pleasures.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Portnoy, "Brahms' Prima Donna."

<sup>59</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 217-218.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>61</sup> Weston, "Richard Mühlfeld."

<sup>62</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 223.

<sup>63</sup> Portnoy, "Brahms' Prima Donna."

<sup>64</sup> Litzman, *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms 1853-1896*, 262.



He wrote to her again on September 11<sup>th</sup> as it came closer to time for Mühlfeld to try the sonatas with him: “As, however, Mühlfeld is anxious to hear the two sonatas, he will probably come to Vienna to try them. I wish I could make the matter simpler for him. Perhaps there may be a town nearer his home to which I would also gladly go.... Meanwhile, perhaps it is better for me to remain at home with the sonatas.”<sup>65</sup> In October, Brahms wrote to Clara again in order to make it possible for her to hear him play the sonatas with Mühlfeld:

Would you kindly let me know by return whether it would be convenient to you if Mühlfeld and I were to play the sonatas to you on November the 12<sup>th</sup>? I should be tremendously pleased if you were to write me a kind ‘yes’.... We might play the pieces to you on the preceding day so that you could thoroughly appreciate them on the day itself.<sup>66</sup>

After getting to hear the sonatas, Clara wrote to Brahms on October 19, 1894, “...the oftener I hear the sonatas the better pleased I shall be.”<sup>67</sup> They gave the first private performance of the sonata soon after for the Duke’s court in Meiningen at the palace of Berchtesgarten.<sup>68</sup> Brahms wrote to Gustav Wendt on September 17, 1894 shortly before the first performance: “I leave tomorrow for a few days in Berchtesgaden, where Mühlfeld is to play splendidly for us. I shall then think of you, to whom I would gladly have granted this pleasure.”<sup>69</sup> The sonatas were premiered publicly by Mühlfeld and Brahms in Vienna on January 7, 1895. Brahms enjoyed his performances with Mühlfeld in Germany and Austria so much that he gave him all the performing rights during his lifetime, all the fees from their joint performances, and the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>68</sup> Portnoy, “Brahms’ Prima Donna.”

<sup>69</sup> Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, 723.



manuscripts for the two sonatas after they were published.<sup>70</sup> Supposedly, the early editions of the sonatas said that they were written for “piano and Mühlfeld” rather than “piano and clarinet.”<sup>71</sup>

After the sonatas were published, Brahms sent the manuscripts back to Mühlfeld and on the last page of the E-flat wrote: “To Herr Richard Mühlfeld in affectionate grateful remembrance as the master of his instrument! J. Brahms, Ischl in Summer '95.”<sup>72</sup> Brahms also wrote a letter to Mühlfeld saying that he had arranged for all performing rights and performance fees for the sonatas to be paid solely to him during Mühlfeld’s lifetime. After Mühlfeld’s death in 1907 from a cerebral hemorrhage, his family remained in possession of the manuscripts until recently when they were sold at an auction to the Robert Owen Lehman Collection, which is currently located at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, but the letter has long since disappeared.<sup>73</sup>

In the late 1880’s, Joachim set out to secure performances for Mühlfeld in England. He wrote to Sir Charles Stanford on December 16, 1887 saying that Mühlfeld was “...a stupendous fellow; I never heard the likes of his vivacity of tone and expression.”<sup>74</sup> In England, Mühlfeld performed Brahms’ works with the Joachim Quartet and Fanny Davies on piano.<sup>75</sup> After spending two years with Robert Schumann at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt (1883-1885), Fanny Davies made her performance debut in England in fall of 1885. She became one of the regular pianists on Arthur Campbell’s series of popular music concerts, which later gave her the opportunity to play Brahms’s chamber music with Richard Mühlfeld and other musicians who

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<sup>70</sup> Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld.”

<sup>71</sup> Henry S. Drinker, *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms* (Philadelphia: Elkan-Vogel Co., 1932), 61.

<sup>72</sup> Weston, “‘Mein Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 227.

<sup>73</sup> Weston, “‘Meine Primadonna’: Mühlfeld,” 227.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>75</sup> Weston, “Richard Mühlfeld.”



worked with the composer on his music.<sup>76</sup> Mühlfeld's first performance of the sonatas in England took place with Fanny Davies on June 24, 1895.<sup>77</sup>

The English premiere took place at St. James's Hall in London. Mühlfeld made the trip especially for this performance after concluding his performances of the works with Brahms in Vienna, Leipzig, Frankfurt, Merseburg, and Meiningen.<sup>78</sup> After the Quintet was premiered in London, played by Mühlfeld and the Joachim Quartet, a critic for *The Times* stated, "Herr Mühlfeld is a superlatively fine artist, and not only his tone, but the perfection of his phrasing, the depth of his musical expression, and his absolute ease and finish, mark him as a player altogether without parallel in England at least." Mühlfeld developed a great following in England, and in addition to his earlier visits, returned to England every year from 1899 to 1907, except for 1903 and 1904. He performed in London, Bolton, Cambridge, Chislehurst, Helensburgh, Malvern, Manchester, Oxford, and York. The entire Meiningen orchestra visited England in 1902 and they received a great reception. Mühlfeld returned to England with the Joachim Quartet in April-May 1906.

It was not long after Mühlfeld and Brahms finished touring together performing the clarinet compositions that Brahms' health quickly deteriorated. The last piece Brahms heard Mühlfeld play was the Weber Quintet, per the composer's request. Mühlfeld saw Brahms for the last time on March 25, 1897 when they were dining with friends. After their meal, Brahms was reluctant to leave his friends and kept and said, "Oh, leave me a little while, it is so lovely here!" Brahms died in Vienna, Austria of cancer just before his 64<sup>th</sup> on April 3, 1897. Because Brahms had been a dominant musical figure in Vienna for the last twenty years of his life, Vienna

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<sup>76</sup> George S. Bozarth, "Fanny Davies and Brahms' Late Chamber Music," in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performing Style*, ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170.

<sup>77</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 227.

<sup>78</sup> Bozarth, "Fanny Davies and Brahms' Late Chamber Music," 190.



declared a day of mourning and buried him in an honorary grave between Beethoven and Schubert. Brahms was one of the four great 19<sup>th</sup> century German lied composers, the other three being Franz Schubert, Hugo Wolf, and Robert Schumann, and the only one to have lived a relatively long life.<sup>79</sup> Brahms's pall-bearers included Fritz Simrock, one of the leading publishers of Brahms' music, Eusebius Mandyczewski, a musicologist, composer, and Brahms' close personal friend, and Antonín Dvořák, to whom Brahms had often given encouragement. Mühlfeld returned to Meiningen soon after and received the news that Brahms was dead on April 3, 1897. The Duke wanted to send Steinbach as his representative to Brahms's funeral, but Steinbach was away and unable to attend. Mühlfeld and Bram-Eldering, who was the leader of the orchestra, were asked to go. Following Brahms's death, any time Mühlfeld travelled to Vienna he would make a point of visiting the composer's friends and continued to make Brahms's works known wherever he went. Mühlfeld had a large portrait of Brahms placed on and easel in the living room of his home.<sup>80</sup>

Brahms' Sonata in F minor for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 120 No. 1 is one of the most beautiful and most difficult works to perform in the clarinetist's repertoire. In this work, Brahms melodies include frequent changes between registers, which are difficult to execute properly on modern clarinets. In the viola and violin transcriptions of this work, the range changes are easier to execute though not as dramatic as they are when played on the clarinet. Brahms combines these dramatic leaps with complex ensemble writing and 19<sup>th</sup> century expansions and interpretations on classical forms to create a work that is beautiful and very characteristic of Brahms. These characteristics of Brahms' compositional style are exhibited in the first movement of the F Minor Sonata. Conrad Wilson says, "Though marked *Allegro appassionato*,

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<sup>79</sup> Avins, "Johannes Brahms."

<sup>80</sup> Weston, "'Meine Primadonna': Mühlfeld," 229-231.



the first movement of the F minor Sonata is a sort of *Valse melancolique*, a sustained, lyrical flow of melody, much of it subdued yet periodically flaring up with big piano chords in the old Brahmsian manner.”<sup>81</sup>

The first movement of the F Minor Sonata is in sonata form. In this case, Brahms stays true to the traditional parameters for sonata form, though he adds his own touch by using frequent modulations to color each of the major parts of the form. Also, Brahms paid close attention to the relationship between a theme and those that came before it, creating a sort of melodic cohesion that holds the movement together throughout each of the major sections of the sonata form.<sup>82</sup> The exposition begins with a short, four-bar introduction played by the piano, before the first theme is played by the clarinet. Originally, the first eight bars of the clarinet part (measures 5-12) were written down an octave, but editions in the manuscript shows that Brahms revised it to the current version shortly after playing it with Mühlfeld for the first time, though it is unknown whether the change was suggested by the clarinetist or the composer. The principal theme is constructed like a typical Classical theme or musical sentence, an appropriately constructed phrase for the opening of a sonata form<sup>83</sup> and is composed of two smaller parts.<sup>84</sup> As Margaret Notley says, “...certain themes by Brahms, such as the one that opens the F Minor Clarinet Sonata, appear to transmute specific Classical types, precluding the possibility he sought such originality even if we did not know his attitude toward these matters.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, 106-107.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, “The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Opus 120, No. 1” in *The Chamber Music of Brahms*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), 248.

<sup>85</sup> Margaret Notley, “Alternative Dichotomies and Over Determined Form in the F Minor Clarinet Sonata,” in *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 101.



The second theme, like the first theme, is also composed of two smaller parts. The first section is more quiet and serious, in D-flat, while the second section is, in C minor, contrasts the first part with its restless rhythm.<sup>86</sup> The D-flat theme (measures 38-52) is based on augmented motives from piano introduction in the first four bars of the movement.<sup>87</sup> It is this type of writing that demonstrates Brahms' attention to detail and his desire to relate each of the themes presented in this movement to each other. This second theme is another example of Brahms' tendency to expand and re-invent Classical forms. In this case, the second theme of an F minor sonata form would be written in the dominant key (C major) or the relative major/mediant (A-flat major). Instead, Brahms modulates to D-flat major, which is the submediant in F minor. A short concluding theme completes the exposition.<sup>88</sup>

Following the exposition, the development section begins with a direct modulation to A-flat Major (measure 90). This is an unusual choice of key since, typically, the development section of a sonata form is used to move to a more distantly related key. The development begins in a completely different mood than the rest of the piece thus far, with a simple, flowing melodic line mixed with less-complicated harmonic material. Daniel Gregory Mason says, “Here we find the final flowering of the chord-line motive of [measure] 93...allowed to generate a five-bar phrase, quite uneventful but full of the covert, almost repressed beauty characteristic of late Brahms.”<sup>89</sup> An early sketch of the first movement shows that Brahms was very concerned with “coordinating the small-scale rhythms arising from motivic development (as in measures 1-4) with both the more slowly moving rhythms created by the succession of phrases and the

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<sup>86</sup> Mason Daniel Gregory Mason, “The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Opus 120, No. 1” in *The Chamber Music of Brahms*. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), 249.

<sup>87</sup> Notley, “Alternative Dichotomies and Over Determined Form in the F Minor Clarinet Sonata,” 104.

<sup>88</sup> Mason, “The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1,” 250.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.



placement of important cadences”<sup>90</sup> He then moves to E major in measure 100, which functions as the leading tone in F minor and is a little more distant than A-flat. In measure 113, he modulates again, this time to C-sharp minor, which is a very distant key from F minor. Approximately one page of the development section is devoted to developing the second theme, following the modulation to E Major. The next portion of the development creates a stormier mood, modulating to C-sharp Minor and briefly developing the principal theme.<sup>91</sup> Following the development, a re-transition begins in measure 125, and modulates again to E Major in measure 132, before returning to F Minor in measure 138 for the recapitulation.

For the most part, Brahms adheres to the traditions of sonata form when it comes to the recapitulation in this particular work. The recapitulation begins in measure 138, with the principal theme beginning an octave lower than its original occurrence, and the added embellishment of the triplets in measures 139 and 141. This time, the second theme is in F major, which is also typical of Classical sonata form. Brahms then returns to F minor in measure 165 before the coda, which begins in measure 214.<sup>92</sup>

Brahms had a strong aversion to the rigidity of tempo that was the inevitable result of constant practice with a metronome. Brahms wrote this in response to his tempo markings in the Requiem:

In my view, the metronome isn’t worth much; at least, so far as I know, many a composer has withdrawn his metronome markings sooner or later. Those which are found in the Requiem are there because good friends talked me into them. For I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together. The so-called elastic tempo is not a new discovery, after all, and to it, as to many another, one should attach a “con discrezione.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Notley, “Alternative Dichotomies and Over Determined Form in the F Minor Clarinet Sonata,” 99.

<sup>91</sup> Mason, “The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1,” 250-251.

<sup>92</sup> See Appendix Example 1 for a line graph of the form of this movement.

<sup>93</sup> Styra Avins, “Performing Brahms’s Music: Clues from His Letters,” in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performing Style*, ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-22.



This is important to remember when playing the F Minor Sonata, particularly the first movement, since adhering to a strict, arbitrary tempo would limit the many different moods expressed in the work. It would be wise to assume that Brahms did not include exact tempo markings for these works because such arbitrary assignments would take away from the expressive music he intended.

Conrad Wilson describes the second movement as "...more of the same, but with a nocturnal stillness even more touching and a musing theme for the clarinet, full of tender twists and turns, which haunts the entire course of the music."<sup>94</sup> This movement, marked *Andante un poco Adagio*, is very different from many of Brahms's compositions, because this particular movement is perfectly suited for the clarinet. This is due to the fact that the clarinet can play at incredibly soft volumes while still being expressive and giving direction to a phrase. This shows how intimately Brahms understood the instrument, particularly due to his enjoyment and attention to Mühlfeld's playing. However, this makes the movement arguably much less compelling when played on the viola or violin.<sup>95</sup>

The second movement is in a simple ternary (ABA') form, also a song form. Mason says, "Whether for the simplicity and homogeneity of its form, based entirely on a single theme and using only identical contrast, or for the gracious curves of its melody, or for the purity of its part-writing and its exquisite use of the lyric powers of the clarinet, this is one of the most intimately lovely of all the slow movements."<sup>96</sup> The A section begins in the first measure and ends in measure 26. The theme is played by the clarinet with the piano accompanying. This section of the movement is very simple and stays in the tonic of A-flat major. This is somewhat unusual for

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<sup>94</sup> Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, 107.

<sup>95</sup> Drinker, *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms*, 62.

<sup>96</sup> Mason, "The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1," 251.



Brahms since he often composed using frequent modulation or color changes, as indicated by the first movement.

However, the simplicity of the A section is contrasted by the B section, which begins in the parallel (G-sharp) minor in measure 27. The B section briefly returns to A-flat major in measure 31 before modulating again to the more distant key of A major (measure 35). This section of the movement is very unusual since the harmonic material is clearly centered on A major even though the key signature is written with four sharps (E major). At first glance, the key signature might seem to be a misprint. However, this is written the same way in multiple editions, including the Wiener Urtext Edition.<sup>97</sup> What is even more unusual is the fact that, throughout the entire movement, the clarinet part stays in A-flat major with the modulations indicated by accidentals even when the key signature in the piano part changes. Following the B section, a re-transition begins in measure 44, and Brahms passes through C major on his way back to the original key of A-flat major. The final section, A', differs from the beginning in that the clarinet plays the melody down an octave in measures 49-58 and the piano accompaniment is considerably more complex. A codetta, beginning in measure 72, ends the movement.<sup>98</sup>

The second movement of the sonata in particular has several discrepancies between the manuscript and published editions of the piece. For example, there are three similar passages in the clarinet part (measures 5-6, 17-18, 53-54, and 65-66) that were each originally written-as notated in the manuscript-with different articulations on the thirty-second notes. The first and third instances are the same (though in measures 17-18 the figure appears down an octave) and the second and fourth instances are the same. In the first instance, the three thirty-second notes in the clarinet part are not slurred, but they are written with a slur in the piano part. In measures 17-

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<sup>97</sup> Johannes Brahms, “Sonata für Klarinette (oder Bratsche) und Klavier f-Moll Op. 120 No.1,” score, 1973, Wiener Urtext Edition, Schott/Universal Edition.

<sup>98</sup> See Appendix Example 2 for a line graph of the form of this movement.



18, the thirty-second notes in both the clarinet part and the piano part (according to the manuscript) were originally written with slurs, but the slurs were later crossed out. The third time, neither the clarinet part nor the piano part had slurs. In the last occurrence, neither part was written with a slur originally, but in the manuscript, slurs had been added to both parts.<sup>99</sup> These days, how to interpret these bars is usually left to the discretion of the performer. There is another change in the manuscript in measures 45-48. Originally, the clarinet part included long notes meant to accompany the melody in the piano part, but Brahms scratched out these notes in the manuscript, possibly to give Mühlfeld a break before playing the melody again in measure 49.<sup>100</sup>

For the duration of the slow movement, there is no dynamic marking louder than the “poco forte” at the beginning until the “forte” marked at measure 67, which serves as the emotional climax of the movement. Most everything is marked piano or pianissimo. This is another indicator of how well Brahms understood and appreciated the characteristics of the clarinet. Estrin says, “... the merest whisper of softest tone for which the clarinet is so incomparable, it is like a meditation in the solitude of evening.”<sup>101</sup>

The third movement is an “intermezzo of the lightest, gentlest sort, shot through with recollections (or so it would seem) of happier days and, in its middle section, a haunting blend of dark-toned clarinet with shimmering piano notes.”<sup>102</sup> The movement is not meant to be serious or overly important like much the beginning of the piece. It is meant to be light and amusing, which is somewhat unusual for Brahms.<sup>103</sup> This movement is in compound ternary form (ABA’). Each

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<sup>99</sup> Mitchell Estrin, “The Brahms Sonatas: An Examination of the Manuscripts,” *The Clarinet* vol. 33 no. 4 (September 2006), 71-72.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 72

<sup>101</sup> Mason, “The Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1,” 252-253.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, 107.

<sup>103</sup> Drinker, *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms*, 62.



of the three bigger sections of this movement can be broken down into smaller pieces, becoming A(abb)B(cdd)A'(a'b'). In other words, the A and B sections can each be broken down into their own small binary form. In the manuscript, a “da cappo” was written after measure 91. However, in current publications this section (A') is written out, without the repeats.<sup>104</sup>

There are some differences in this movement between the manuscript and published editions. For example, in measures 15-16, the accents on the downbeats should actually be diminuendi. In the manuscript, this section is “da capo,” which means that the written out version it should be played the same as the beginning with the diminuendi instead of accents.<sup>105</sup> Like the second movement, the third movement provides interesting contrast to the very somber first movement. As Daniel Gregory Mason says, “There is a tireless freshness of impulse about the way it constantly renews itself... it is a dull listener who does not glow with some of the gratification that fills the players.”<sup>106</sup>

The final movement of the F Minor Sonata is marked “Vivace.” Wilson says, “the composer shakes off his sadness and swings his F minor sonata into F major for a cheerfully pattering rondo which only occasionally sinks into the work’s previous mood of Brahmsian regret.”<sup>107</sup> The movement is in rondo form, though once again Brahms abandons the traditional parameters for this form in favor of something more unique. A traditional layout for a five-part rondo form would be ABACA or similar. In this movement, Brahms creates the following: ABA’CB’A”. The movement begins with an energetic introduction in the piano, followed by bugle-like calls in the clarinet. The A section, measures 9-36 briefly modulates to A minor before returning to F major. The A section is followed by a short transition (measures 36-42)

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<sup>104</sup> See Appendix Example 3 for a line graph of the form of this movement.

<sup>105</sup> Estrin, “The Brahms Sonatas: An Examination of the Manuscripts,” 73.

<sup>106</sup> Mason, “The F Minor Clarinet Sonata, Op. 120, No. 1,” 253.

<sup>107</sup> Wilson, *Notes on Brahms: 20 Crucial Works*, 107.



where Brahms modulates to C major for the B section. Following the B section there is a re-transition (measures 62-77) where it modulates back to F major. The re-transition includes a restatement of the bugle-like introduction from the beginning of the movement (measures 73-77). After the restatement of the A section, the C section modulates to the relative minor (D minor). Next, Brahms breaks with the traditional rondo form and immediate moves to a restatement of the B section (measure 142), this time in F major, before the A section returns for the last time in measure 200. A short, emphatic coda concludes the piece.<sup>108</sup>

The fourth movement does not contain many differences between the manuscript and published editions. In measures 209-210, the long notes in the clarinet part were originally written as Gs in the manuscript for the clarinet part, but they were later changed to Bs in the piano part.<sup>109</sup> This is how it appears in current publications. Even though this might seem like a minor detail, the performers should keep this change in mind while playing this movement, especially since the half notes are all Gs in the earlier statements of this motive. This joyful ending is also fairly unusual for Brahms, though as Henry S. Drinker says, “Brahms knew always when and how to stop.”<sup>110</sup>

Many clarinetists and non-clarinetists alike have been curious about the man whose playing was able to inspire Brahms to come out of his compositional retirement. The fact that Mühlfeld was even able to change Brahms’s mind speaks volumes about what type of musician he must have been. The musicianship of both the clarinetist and the composer is evident in the F Minor Sonata, which demonstrates Brahms’ talent as a composer combined with his knowledge of well Mühlfeld could play his instrument. This work also shows the relationship that developed between these two men, and it is evident in the fact that the work was perfectly suited to the

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<sup>108</sup> See Appendix Example 4 for a line graph of the form of this movement.

<sup>109</sup> Estrin, “The Brahms Sonatas: An Examination of the Manuscripts,” 73.

<sup>110</sup> Drinker, *The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms*, 62.

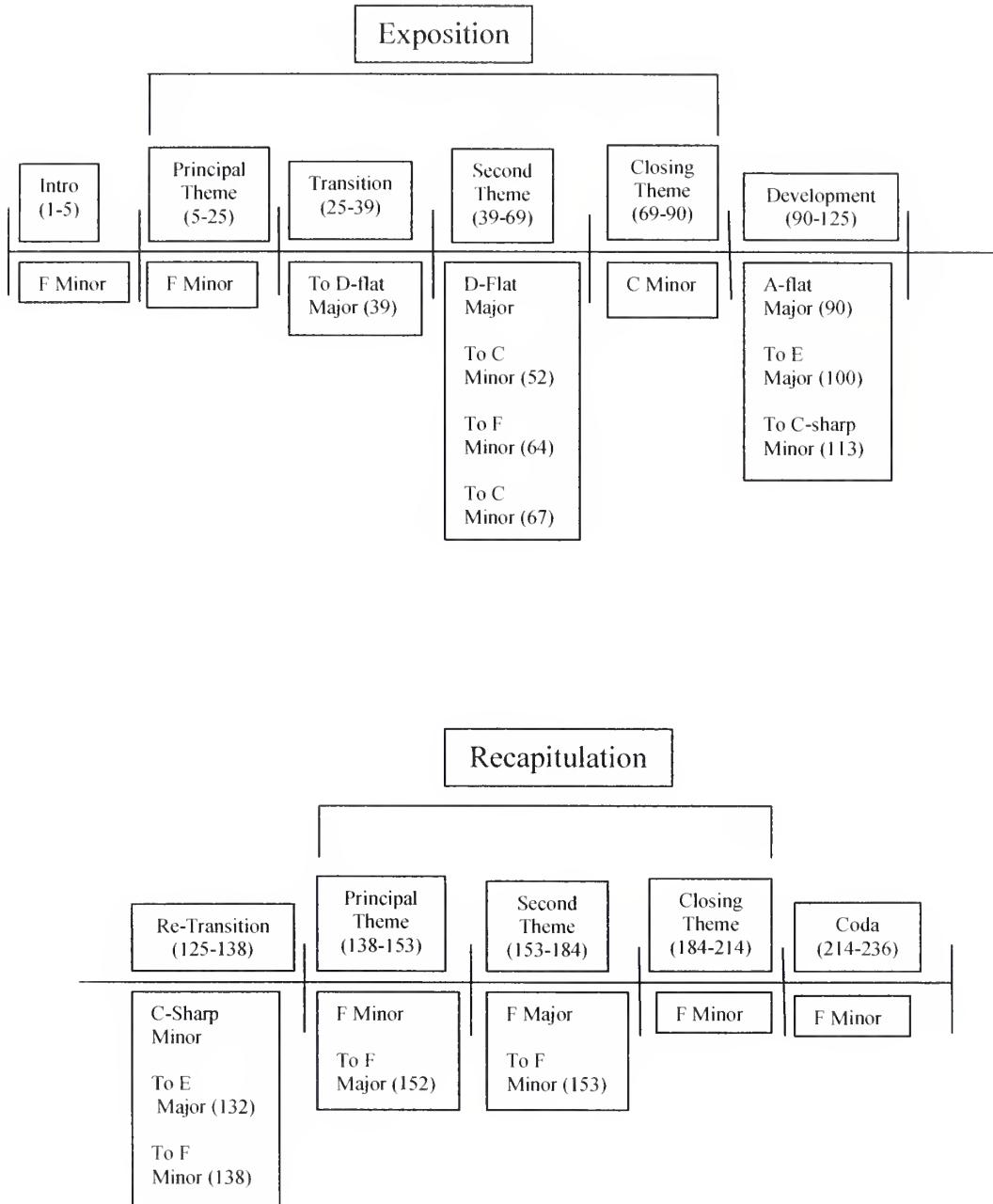


Mühlfeld's style of playing and to the clarinet in general. It was the collaboration of these two great musical minds resulted in four outstanding pieces that are permanent and essential elements of the clarinet repertoire.



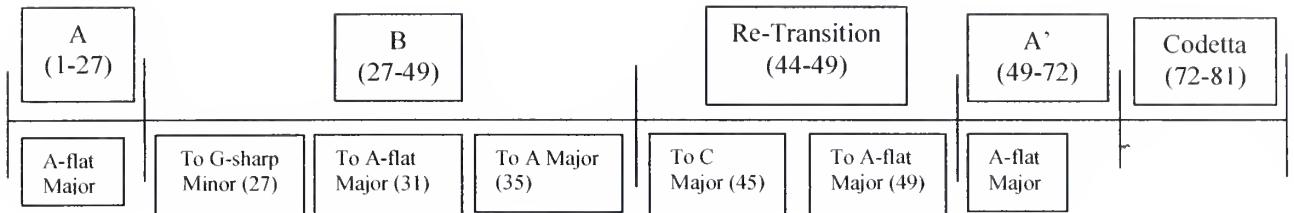
## Appendix

### Example 1: First Movement – Sonata Form

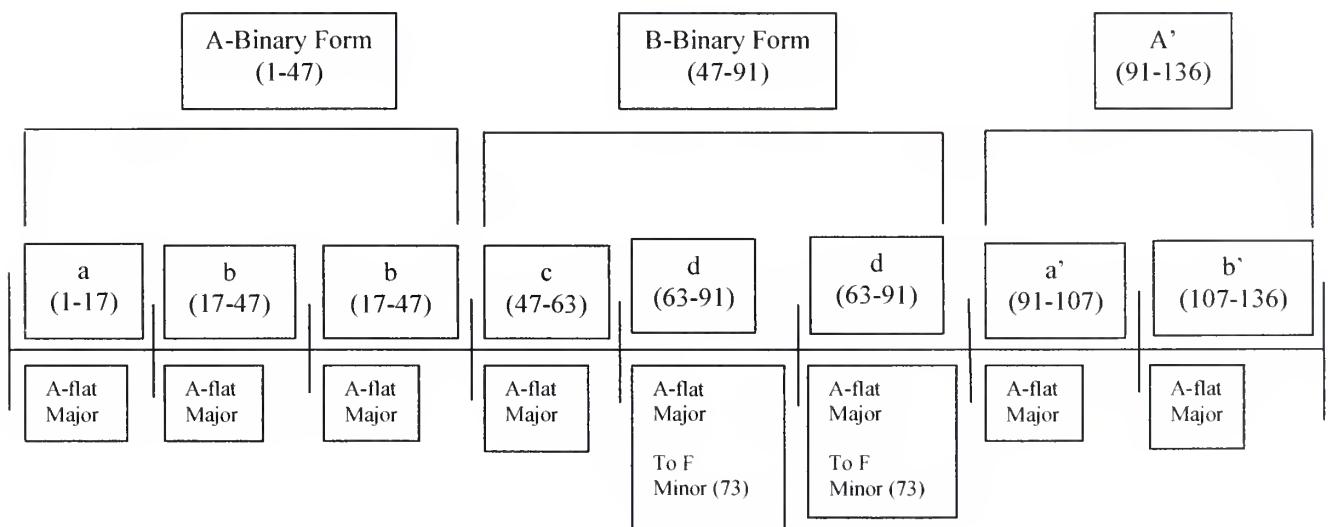




## Example 2: Second Movement – Simple Ternary Form

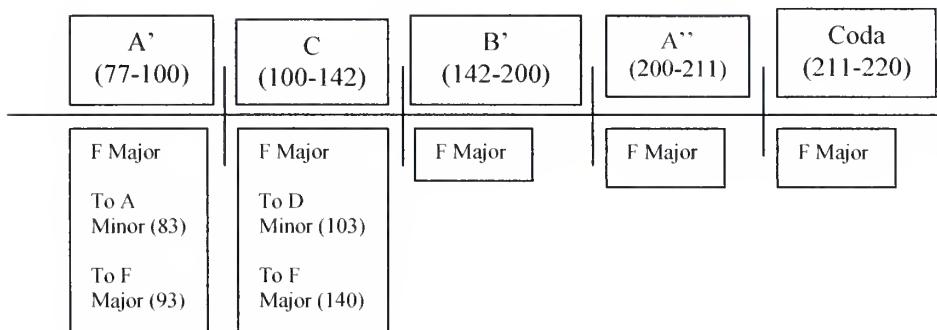
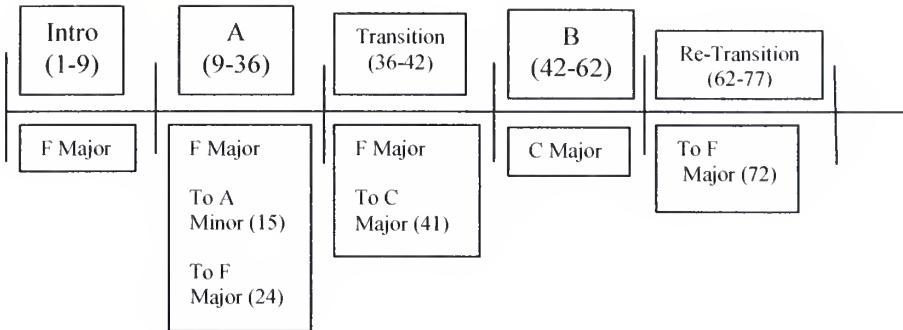


## Example 3: Third Movement – Compound Ternary Form





### Example 4: Fourth Movement – Rondo Form





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